

Sales Start Online

Crafting a First Call Advantage

How much does your company invest in the web? Maybe a few thousand dollars for a new website every few years? Bad move. The web is the most important tool for any sales force. A company's investment online should be in line with the cost of a salesperson.

In the past ten years sales has undergone a metamorphosis. Prior to 2000, the purchasing process started with salespeople. If a company was feeling some pain, or needed to consider their options, they called their sales rep. The rep could diagnose their problem, discuss their options, prepare quotes and help them decide next steps. The web has changed that dynamic. Customers don't go to salespeople for advice anymore, they go online.

From books to vehicles to capital equipment, customers start their buying process online. This means every company needs to be extending their sales programs to the web. There are three key areas to consider in your web strategy: search engine optimization, website experience, and lead conversion.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

You can find virtually anything on Google: advice, products, services, reviews, referrals, how-to guides, you name it. Whatever your heart desires, your search can find. Search results are one of the most powerful lead generating tools available. If your company comes up with top search results, you will drive interested buyers to your website and into the sales process.

Achieving a high search ranking in Google does not happen accidentally – it requires search engine optimization, or SEO. SEO is a process of tuning your site for top

search results. You can improve your Google ranking by continually crafting your content, your website structure, the links coming into your site, and your key words. This is not a one shot deal. It requires a regular, monthly commitment to keeping your content relevant for Google. You could bring the process in-house, but for \$12,000 to \$24,000 per year it is just as easy to outsource the function to experts.

Website Experience

Is your site better looking than your competitors? Is it easier to use? If not, then it is time for a makeover.

People aren't patient searchers. They look at the first few options that come up in Google, and click on the sites that look most relevant to their needs. If a site doesn't catch their attention in five seconds or less, they are gone. They click back to their search results and look for another page. Searchers keep pecking away until they find what they are looking for. This means that your company not only has to achieve high search results, but your site has to catch the searcher's attention.

Companies should be revamping their website every eighteen months. This will keep your site's content, design and brand fresh. You can't rest on your laurels here. An outdated site says so much about your company.

Your website is your customers' first impression of your company. Consider this the introductory meeting, and you want to get things off on the right foot. Help your customers get the information they need. They want to know who you are, what you sell, who you sell to and why they should work with your company. They aren't looking for chest pounding language like, "We are the largest, oldest, best company since sliced bread." They want to know the facts, and they will decide whether to engage with you or not. Puffery and cheesy tactics just don't work.

Invest wisely in your site. You should be budgeting \$15,000 to \$30,000 to produce your site, and again this is not a one shot deal. The next version should be implemented within eighteen months.

Lead Conversion

Your customers have found your site, they have spent some time getting to know your company, and now they are ready to speak


with a salesperson. Make the process easy. No one wants to hunt around for a Contact Us page. Help them engage your sales team quickly and easily.

First and foremost, it should be blatantly easy to connect with a salesperson in your organization. Look at Salesforce.com's site. On every page there is a section titled, "Next Steps." This menu item gives the customer a few options: Free Trial, View Demo or Contact Me. Each option fulfills a desire for more information. Ultimately though, Salesforce.com is driving these interested customers to their sales team. When you complete one of these forms, a Salesforce.com salesperson will contact you within twenty-four hours. This rapid response is key to converting web leads into sales opportunities.

Web leads are gold. These customers are engaged in the buying process, and they are looking for information quickly. Your goal should be to respond to all web leads within four hours. If someone took the time to request information from your site, they want a quick response. The longer they wait, the more likely they will be off to your competitors and requesting information from them too. Age your leads, and hold your sales reps accountable to following up with them in a pre-set timeframe.

Building Your Web Strategy

Leveraging the web is a must for any sales force. If your customers are there, well you have to be there too. It's that simple.

I am a firm believer in this process. I have seen the results in my business. In 2004, our sales team generated all of their business through cold calling and networking. Today, our web strategy has completely replaced those prospecting activities. We generate 75% of our customers from the web, and at the same time have reduced our sales cycle by four times. We are getting better quality leads that we can close faster. With an ROI like that, it is easy to be an advocate for selling over the web. 

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